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**March 5, 2007**

## **Department of Ag wraps up Drought Assistance Program**

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) has completed the distribution of \$1.6 million to ranchers across the state through the Livestock Assistance Grant Program.

The funding was part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) drought assistance package announced in August. USDA charged the Wyoming Department of Agriculture with distributing the money to aid beef cattle and sheep producers whose forage was adversely impacted by the 2006 drought.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of both the Natural Resources and Administration Divisions, especially Justin Williams and Gina Morgando, for their exemplary efforts in putting together and carrying out this drought assistance program," Wyoming Department of Agriculture Director John Etchepare said. "It is a prime example of WDA personnel putting in extra effort to support Wyoming agriculture."

Livestock numbers in Wyoming have steadily declined since the beginning of the drought in 2002. This program made it possible for livestock producers to apply for funds for various expenses such as lost forage, supplemental feeding, relocating livestock, new feed supplies, increased feed transportation and emergency water supplies.

Eligible counties included Big Horn, Campbell, Carbon, Crook, Fremont, Hot Springs, Johnson, Laramie, Natrona, Park, Sheridan, Sweetwater, and Washakie. Applications were mailed to over 8,000 producers throughout the eligible counties, and the department received just over 1,100 back.

When the application period ended December 15, the number of eligible livestock was calculated and the \$1.6 million was prorated on a per-head basis. Producers received \$4.23 per head for cattle and \$1.41 per head for sheep, with many producers receiving the maximum amount of \$10,000. After the money was divided, \$261.52 was returned to the federal government. Checks were mailed on February 6, and electronic funds transfers were completed on February 7.

"No additional funds are available at this time and there are currently no plans for a future program," Etchepare said. "However, through the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, I am working with other directors of agriculture and USDA to make future drought programs more responsive to the needs of the individual states as well as the criteria required for individual producers to qualify for these programs."

If new programs do arise, the Wyoming Department of Agriculture will do everything within its authority to notify and assist as many producers as possible.

Questions can be directed to the Wyoming Department of Agriculture at (307) 777-7323.

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